

Coins

By design, Anthony dollar creator urges all to spend

By Roger Boye

ALTHOUGH THE Susan B. Anthony dollar won't be released into circulation until July, the coin's designer already is championing its cause.

"I've been talking it up every chance I get, urging people to use the coin so the government will save a lot of money in the printing of \$1 bills," said Frank Gasparro, chief engraver of the United States Mint.

The Anthony dollar is only one of Gasparro's many achievements. His work graces several coins and nearly 100 medals produced by the federal government, including the Lincoln cent (Lincoln Memorial reverse) and Kennedy half-dollar (presidential coat of arms reverse).

"Of my coin designs, I like Anthony the best," said Gasparro, who admitted that reaching the final product wasn't easy.

Originally, Gasparro proposed a "classical Liberty" design for the new dollar coin. Although the portrayal was—and still is—praised by many collectors, it ran into trouble on Capitol Hill. Feminists and others convinced legislators that a "real woman" should be depicted on a circulating U.S. coin, and suffragette Anthony emerged as the choice.

"I didn't know the mood of Congress when I suggested the Liberty design last year. I was jolted (by the rejection), but I was certainly willing to move with the times," he said. Gasparro, 69, joined the engraving staff of the U.S. Mint in 1942 and became chief engraver in 1965.

Before working on the Anthony design, he spent a week studying the life of the famous women's rights advocate who died in 1906. He based his "first draft" on a picture of Anthony, but the design was criticized

by Anthony's grandniece, who accused Gasparro of "prettying Susan."

Gasparro then refined the design, depicting Susan Anthony in the prime of life, with a strong neck, marked cheek and jaw bones, pointed chin, and what he calls a "classic sculptural head." Anthony's descendant praised the revision.

"My work in portrait sculpture paid off in designing the Anthony dollar," said Gasparro, whose initials appear on both sides of the coin (the tails-side design was taken from the Eisenhower dollar that Gasparro designed in 1970). He sculpts as a hobby, and many of his works have been in exhibitions.

A coin designer is also a sculptor, because once a design is on paper, it must be carved into a large disk made of a claylike substance. Eventually, the design is reduced in size and mechanically engraved into a metal disk or "die" that is used to produce coins.

As do many collectors, Gasparro believes the \$20 gold piece designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens early this century is the most beautiful U.S. coin. He also admires the "terrific power and strength" portrayed in the head of the Indian on the buffalo nickel.

Currently, Gasparro and six others design and engrave dies at the "mother mint" in Philadelphia. Several times during the interview, he examined work completed by his assistants and, at one point, rejected a die for a proof Kennedy half-dollar because the "S" mint mark was out of place.

"Can't let that go by," he said with a smile. "Otherwise, collectors would have a field day and we'd be reading stories dubbed: 'The Kennedy half with a slipped mint mark.'"